

SEDCU

Supporting the Education of Disadvantaged Children in Uganda

July 2023

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Newsletter 19

Welcome to SEDCU Newsletter No.19 covering the period February 2023– July 2023

This issue primarily reports on the outcomes from the first post pandemic visit to Uganda by SEDCU founder trustees in March 2023. The country is still recovering from COVID and is facing fresh challenges caused by the war in Ukraine and fighting in the Uganda/DRC/Rwanda border area. However, Jan and Ben were warmly welcomed and were gratified to find the schools, colleges, and universities they visited were in good shape and achieving very good results. Not surprisingly, the children sponsored through SEDCU had grown up a lot since 2019. They also met a number of newly sponsored children who have been added to the list in the intervening years

KDS Participation in National Paralympic Games Competition

KDS sent a team to participate in this championship which was held in Luwero about 11 hours drive from Kisoro. There were 12 special needs children participating and two teachers to supervise them. 6 of the 12 were children sponsored through SEDCU. Events in which they participated included running (50m, 100m, 150m 200m and 1500m), shot put, javelin, long jump, high jump and discus. A total of 9 out of the 12 were placed in the top 5 in at least one of the events. Here are some photographs of sponsored children in action.



In the conclusion to the KDS report was written “We have no words to thank SEDCU that fully funded the activity. Long live SEDCU! Long live KDS!”

Successful Visit to Uganda

SEDCU Founder Trustees Ben and Jan made their 6th visit to Uganda in March (at their own expense as ever). Their aim was to renew important community contacts and see all the sponsored children, their teachers and, where relevant, their parents and/or family members. In a two week visit they saw all 33 sponsored children, visited two primary schools, four secondary schools, two vocational colleges and met four children now at various Universities. They met about 30 parents/grandparents and a similar number of teachers. In reaching the twelve destinations they estimate they must have travelled around 1000 miles, but given the dreadful condition of some of the "roads" (tracks) it felt a lot further! They were greeted everywhere with courtesy and appreciation, and so many people they met wanted to say how much they appreciated the work of all the SEDCU trustees and the generosity of all the sponsors and other donors and supporters. Many took time to explain what a difference SEDCU is making to their children's lives and were particularly grateful that Ben and Jan continued regular visits, in some cases also remarking 'despite their great age!!!'

Voices of the Children

When SEDCU trustees visit the primary schools, there is always a traditional welcome event organised with singing, dancing, music and speeches. As part of this event at Kisoro Demonstration School (KDS) in March, Jan and Ben were treated to some marvellous displays but the most moving event was when four of the sponsored children stood up and made speeches to express their appreciation. Here are some extracts.



AN - a blind girl who has just graduated from college and returned to KDS as a trainee teacher:

“Despite my disability, SEDCU trustees and my sponsor have given me not only hope in life but also a sense of belonging. I am blind physically but intellectually awake. These special friends have given me education, and education has given me light. This means I am now no longer blind. I have the hope that I will qualify to be a teacher. My dream is to be the light to the blind children that you sponsor here. It is a lit candle that lights other candles. As a teacher, if you allow me to further my education, this dream will come true.”

TN - a blind boy in KDS P7 class hoping to go on to secondary school:

“We blind children are in a changing world. We used not to be seen, we had no voice, but these days we are heard through education. This is a golden opportunity to thank you, our lovely visitors. We needed comfort and you really cared for us. You even wonder whether we have fed well and slept well. There is no greater love than this, you are the solid rock on which we stand. Without you, life is naught. Through your support, to achieve education is a key to our success”



IU - a newly sponsored child in KDS P4 class recited a poem he had written:

“EDUCATION EDUCATION EDUCATION
Education is my bread earner
Education is my life giver
Education is my source of everything
Oooohhh education

Without it there is misery
Without it there is poverty
Without it there is slavery
Without it there is no liberty
Oooooohhhh education

Through you, sponsors are found
Through you, life is smooth
Through you, there is a source of hope
Through you I don't feel ashamed
Oooohh education”



J is a former KDS pupil who is deaf and has returned to KDS from vocational college for work experience making school uniforms and teaching knitting!

She spoke of her deep gratitude to SEDCU and said “From the bottom of my heart, I want to thank my sponsor and Jan and Ben for the great support they have given me towards my education. If it was not for you, I wouldn't have reached where I am now.”

She continued to say she hopes to gain higher qualifications in design that she could never have dreamed to be possible.



Mgahinga Community Junior School (MCJS)

The welcome we received was, once again, warm and genuine and the staff had put themselves out to spend time with us. The school now has upward of 180 pupils with numbers growing all the time, thanks to the outstanding P7 results for which the school has become known. Thankfully, now they are free from the threat of Covid, and have coped with the impact of the refugees from DRC, the staff and children are able to forge ahead once again!



A few days earlier, we had been introduced to Innocent, the new Head Teacher, by our contact at MCDO and the Chair of the Governors. We found him open, warm, full of ideas and with aspirations and high standards. We toured the buildings and facilities, talked with teachers and met with the 7 children sponsored through SEDCU.

There are 12 teachers in the school, and some have been there for a number of years. The children are all taught in English from Nursery up, a good preparation for secondary school and later life. Their exercise books are all neat, tidy, marked and impressive! Handwriting is very important!



Once again, we were treated to a Welcome Ceremony full of life and colour -and emotion! Speeches written and given by the Head Boy and Head Girl, Head of Sponsored Children shown here, and Head and Deputy of Clubs were thoughtful, confident and, at times, emotional. We witnessed amazing dancing and singing too. A real joy!

We saw the sanitary block and farm area sited behind the new school block. The farm is very productive and provides the kitchen with fresh vegetables!



Our contacts at the school and Community Development Organisation also arranged for us to meet the parents/family members of most of the sponsored students both at MCJS and those who have now progressed to Secondary Schools. This was an opportunity for questions to be asked and answers to be given and proved to be an informative, rewarding and, at times emotional occasion. Many attending were familiar faces we had had the pleasure of meeting before, others were new to us and we to them. They all expressed their appreciation to the school and SEDCU.



We said farewell with the knowledge that MCJS is in good hands, has the support of the families and community and is achieving good results. It has grown in every sense since our first visit in 2011 which was when the first seeds of SEDCU were sown!

The pupils are respected, supported and given every opportunity to succeed by dedicated staff, pictured here. We are proud to support them!

Kisoro Demonstration School (KDS)

Our return to KDS was full of joy! Of the 680 pupils in the school, 145 have a wide range of Special Educational Needs. 7 are sponsored through SEDCU. There are 22 teachers in the school and there is 1 teacher per 10 deaf pupils. Blind students are absorbed into ordinary classes with an assistant. We met and talked with Stephen, the Head Teacher, and with Nestor for the first time in his capacity as Head of Special Needs. The children are always full of energy but courteous and smiling!



We saw the fruits of the Scouting trip in the grounds and were impressed by the enthusiasm of these young people and their ingenuity creating raised beds and chairs out of old tyres. The farm is also very productive.

We toured the site and visited the new boarding house for blind, deaf and disabled pupils provided by another charity. (see below) This was still under construction in 2019 but is now very much in use.



We also visited the Technology Room which has continued to develop. Seeing the blind and deaf students using the computing facilities was very uplifting. We saw a screen for enlarging print and a new printer which converts Word documents to braille and can follow voice commands from screen icons. The deaf also use the computers with confidence.

As is traditional, the school put on an inspired welcome event. Seeing the school pupils all together is always emotional! Many familiar faces and lots of new ones.



As well as the speeches from sponsored children we were treated to song and dance displays, a play, and music from the band, which some readers may recall we part funded a number of years ago.

In addition, we saw many of the products of the Arts and Crafts project which we still fund. It has given many students the opportunity to attend Vocational College and graduate in Knitting and Tailoring. They are all proving very creative!



The Headteacher also arranged for us to meet the parents/family members of the majority of the sponsored students. This was such a happy, rewarding and emotional occasion. Some we had had the pleasure of meeting before, others were new to us and we to them. They asked questions, expressed their appreciation and we were left in no doubt of the contribution SEDCU makes to the lives of these families.

When we took our leave, it was with gratitude to the Headteacher and his staff for the opportunities given to many of these vulnerable young people and for the love, devotion and selflessness shown to them. They really are living the school motto: "Disability is not Inability".



Visits to Vocational Colleges

This was our second visit to Kisoro International Vocational Institute. This growing institution gives less academic students opportunities to gain new skills in subjects such as hairdressing, plumbing, construction, car mechanics, tailoring and food production.



One of the sponsored children from Mgahinga Community Junior School (MCJS) has started a course in bricklaying and we were fortunate to be able to see him in action!

Also KIVI is again opening its doors to refugees escaping from the fighting in DRC which we applaud.

We were also glad to be able to make a repeat visit to St Bruno Vocational College near Mbarara. Three deaf girls from KDS are now studying tailoring and we were able to see the excellent facilities and to watch the girls operating their treadle sewing machines.



Sponsored University Students

This year four of our six students who attended various universities and colleges will be graduating!

A (one of our blind students) has completed her Primary Teacher Training Certificate and is currently back at KDS gaining experience working with blind pupils. **P** has completed her course in Tourism and Hotel Management and is working in a luxury adventure lodge while awaiting her results. **S** has taken her final exams in Medical Laboratory Technology and has been offered a position in a well-respected hospital! **J** has completed her course at Vocational College and is now back at KDS making school uniforms and knitting school jumpers to gain experience before deciding on her next move. We send them all our congratulations!

Of the two still at University, both have been highlighted in previous issues. **J** is in his second year and studying Social Work and Social Administration and **G** (another blind student) is coming to the end of his third year studying English (he told us Shakespeare is still his favourite author!) He hopes to teach sighted children!

We reported on **G** in the last newsletter regarding his football success! Since then G has also trialed for the 2024 Paralympics. He went to Morocco but was 3 seconds too slow in 200 mtrs!! The latest news is he is coming to BIRMINGHAM in August to represent Uganda in Archery!! We are very much hoping to meet up with him there.

Niyonzima Nestor

We featured Nestor in our last issue. It was a great pleasure to meet with Nestor again and this time discuss with him his role at KDS as Head of the Special Educational Needs Support Team. SEDCU is sponsoring him to take his degree in Special Needs Education and he is already putting into practice much of what he has been studying, to supplement his years of experience. In addition to teaching, he also makes many of the exercise books required by all the pupils, on the premises! His good humour, dedication to duty and gentle way with the children impressed us. Nestor is on the far right of this photo, with other members of staff and the eight sponsored children/young people!



Growing Numbers at Secondary Schools

Our sponsored children are growing up fast! The Ugandan system of education sees a typical child spend 7 years in primary school and taking his/her leaving certificate exams at age 13 or 14 - although sometimes they can be much older. To attend any secondary school children must obtain satisfactory marks in the exams and have sufficient financial resources too. Pupils generally spend 6 years at secondary school, before taking A Level exams and then transitioning to tertiary education where appropriate.

We now have five SEDCU sponsored children attending Kisoro Vision Secondary School (KVSS), which has a very strong reputation. We also have one at Standard Secondary School (SSS) close to KVSS, and three at Bufumbira Adventist Vocational Secondary School (BAVOSS) which has a stronger vocational element in its curriculum. Two blind boys are at Hornby High School (HHS) in nearby Kabale.

We were delighted to be able to visit all these schools during our recent trip and very much enjoyed spending time with all the students.

Uganda school attack by militants linked to Islamic State group

Readers may well have heard about the atrocities committed at a school in Uganda close to the border with the DRC. Five militants attacked the Lhubiriha Secondary School in Mpondwe on June 17th. They entered dormitories, setting fire and using machetes to kill and maim the pupils, officials said. The Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) - based in the Democratic Republic of Congo - have been blamed and a manhunt is under way. Uganda's information minister said 37 students and 5 adults were confirmed to have been killed, and 8 people were abducted, 4 of whom have since been rescued as of June 24th.

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres condemned the "appalling act" and called for those behind it to be brought to justice.

The ADF has not yet said it was behind the attack though it has carried out attacks in Uganda in the past. While blaming "the terrorists of ADF" for what happened, President Museveni has also talked, without elaborating, about "wrangles" over the school ownership and has ordered improvements in intelligence gathering by the armed forces.

The school is about 300kms north of the schools which SEDCU supports in Mgahinga and Kisoro. Like the school in Mpondwe, MCJS is very close to the DRC border, and indeed it experienced an influx of DRC refugees flooding across the border last year. As a result, the school had to close for a period.

We wrote to our main contacts at the schools to convey our condolences, and they have replied to express their horror at the attack and the loss of so many young lives.



WELCOME TO D!

D is 7 years old and deaf. She comes from a very poor family. We did not meet her when we were in Kisoro as she started at KDS after the Easter holiday. Happily, she is settling in well at the school. Even more pleasing is that she has sponsors to support her!

The following article tells you more about them! We are delighted that they have joined the SEDCU family and are very grateful for their support!

FUNDRAISING

Charity Dance Class



The class involved the dancers learning signs throughout the warmups and then learning and performing a dance piece that combined contemporary dance with sign language. It was very exciting to have a class which combined two of our favourite things; dancing and signing. We raised over £70!"

Our newest sponsors wrote. "Hello! We are the Eason's and we have two beautiful children, who are both profoundly deaf. This year we were very excited to start sponsoring a little girl through SEDCU who is also deaf. On Wednesday 24th May, my daughter Ava-Rose and I taught a charity dance class in aid of SEDCU and their work supporting children with hearing and sight impairments.

HATS!

You may recall a photo, in a previous issue, of some ladies from Hexham Inner Wheel Club with the hats and blankets they had knitted during the Lockdown. They were joined by friends and relatives and the clicking of knitting needles could be heard far and wide! We were able to donate the blankets to Ukraine.

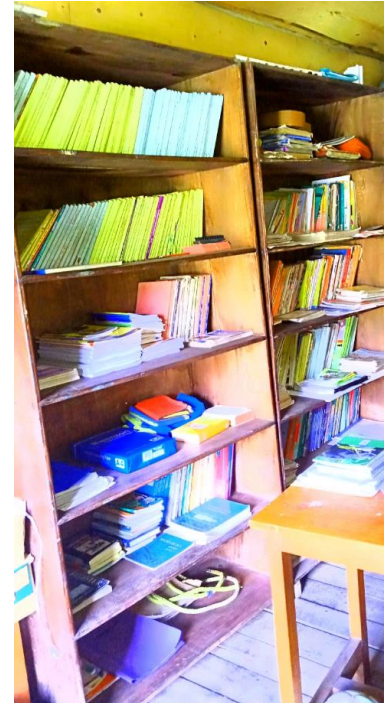


The hats were safely stored until we took nearly 400 to Uganda where they were distributed to the Special Needs pupils at KDS and the whole school at Mgahinga.

The bags are already filling up in anticipation of our next visit!

LIBRARY TEXTBOOK PROJECT

Readers will recall we featured the launch of our Library Textbook Project in the last issue. We have now received from MCJS the list of books they need and raised around £1250 out of a target of £2300. Some of this was raised by the Colour Rush (see separate article). The first tranche of books has been purchased and are pictured here. Fundraising will continue.



COLOUR RUSH 2023



In May 2023, Becky, SEDCU Trustee and three of her good friends took part in the 5k Colour Rush. Much fun was had by all, and they raised an amazing £205 for the MCJS Library Textbook Project.

HADRIAN'S WALL WALK

SEDCU Chairman Ben has decided to set himself the challenge of walking the whole 85-mile length of Hadrian's Wall in one week in October to raise money for SEDCU. The specific plan would be to raise funds for the Library Textbook Project and for laptops and other costly equipment needed by the growing number of sponsored children aiming for College and University. Ben says "Hadrian built the Wall in AD122 to create a barrier to stop the Barbarians from entering England. (With apologies to our Scottish supporters) SEDCU is working to break down barriers for disadvantaged children in Uganda trying to gain an education. I will be walking to help them." If any SEDCU supporters would like to join him for a typical 12-mile one day segment and enjoy the spectacular Northumberland countryside while helping to raise money, do let Ben know. Or if you are able to sponsor him, please make a donation of any amount, either by cheque or online bank transfer using the details at the foot of this page of the newsletter. Or you can donate through JustGiving using the link <https://checkout.justgiving.com/c/2809308>

Thank you to our sponsors, donors, supporters and all who take an interest in SEDCU. Together we can continue to make our stated mission a reality. If you wish to donate you can do so through the website or by cheque made out to SEDCU and mailed to Lowstead, Highford Lane, Hexham NE46 2DP. Or you can pay online into the SEDCU account, sort code 20-74-81, account number 83561356.

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